



Library podcast

Virtual It's About Time Writers' Reading Series #391

00:00:01 Peggy

Good evening everyone and welcome to reading 391 of the It's About Time Writers' Reading Series. Broadcasting, if you will, live from the Ballard, my own Ballard Library instead of the Ballard branch of The Seattle Public Library. But as we discovered last month, that allowed us to have participants from Ecuador and Korea as well as throughout the United States. So we will embrace the silver lining while we have it. Tonight, I am very excited to finally have my friend Mary Pan reading along with her writing group, which is going to be introduced by Kelly Martineau. And that's been a long time coming. And so I'm also delighted that I get to sit back and enjoy the reading that they put together for us. I'd also like to take this opportunity to say how much I miss having Gio Levin in front of me, listening, as he always was, for all the years that I was curating the It's About Time Writers' Reading Series. Being able to look out and see Gio and Carol Levin always in the exact same seats, looking up at me, made it always worthwhile. And I will never forget that remarkable mirroring face that was Gio. So thank you so much for sharing him with us, Carol. I'd now like to introduce, and I'm going to put her on the spot, Joan Rudd is going to be doing the open mic tonight and so we're going to start with that. Any other open mics, if you are interested, you can let me know in the chat. And those would be at the end of the reading. So Joan is going to be a featured reader in August, so welcome. Joan Rudd, please.

00:02:13 Joan

Hi. Hello. Thank you for having me on. I self published a book- "Building Solid." I'm going to read a story from it. It's basically my autobiography. "'Sex Education Through French Folksong.' We used to sing in the car in French, led by my mother, who drove half the distance going to and coming back from our weekend country place. We kids would sing out loud with her. Now that I think about it. The singing might have started as a ploy to keep us from squabbling with each other in the backseat, but my mother clearly loved to sing, to belt out smutty drinking songs with gusto and a little glee. The meaning is somewhat disguised from us since they were in French. I aim to sing like that these days. Open chest and full volume. The French syllables roll out of the mouth like grains spilling out of a jar, smoothly and relentlessly. My mother lived in France from age three to 25 and attended French schools which were overwhelmingly Catholic in population. She completed medical school, too. Still unusual for a woman in the late 1930s. Actually, I remember her fury at my self assigned duties during my young first marriage in 1967. 'I did not go to medical school in the 1930s so you could iron your husband's shirts,' she once shouted at me. Of course, by leaving me in the care of housekeepers as a young girl, I learned exactly what my womanly duties were to clean, to take care of clothes, and most importantly, to cook, especially delicious apple pies. But I digress from the bawdy

songs in French. It is only recently that I understood them as a form of sex education as well as a French language and culture. They were even offered at age appropriate levels. First we learned [speaking French], a harmless rhythmic ditty about bowing and courtesy and curtsying. Next there was [singing in French] which is 'How Good It Is To Sleep Next to My Blonde.' Sleeping with someone was a contemporary euphemism for making love. So I remember internalizing that blonde was good, like at least three of my aunts at that time. And then sleeping next to someone was also good. At age six, taken to the big Fifth Avenue FAO Schwarz toy store, I wanted to see their famous stuffed animals. Next to a display of horned reindeer was a beautiful, life sized, smooth faced male doll dressed in furry Eskimo parka, gloves, trousers and fur trimmed boots. 'I want one,' I said. 'Oh, but darling, what would you do with such a large stuffed doll?' 'I want to sleep with him,' I said, clearly loudly enough for the sales lady to go into paroxysms of suppressed giggles while exchanging eye glances with my embarrassed mother, who also hit a smile. I don't remember how she got me out of there, but I do remember wanting that man. The next time we went to the store, he had disappeared from the display. Moving on to a sailor song [singing in French] we love shouting out [speaking in French] 'Shit on the King of England,' but also sang along on the chorus of 'Drink to the health of lovers everywhere.' So I learned that lovers were good. More difficult instructions followed with [singing in French], whose unfortunate meeting with four young men the intrepid one, the less wise one, et cetera, resulted in a gently phrased gang event among the reeds. The song moral for that one was that men are all pigs. Pretty tough for age nine or so. The gentler love story [singing in French] depicted a dreamy girl who believes a singing guy, that he will stick around after undoing her blouse. Instead she remains a flower, dying gently by the side of the road. If all this was not enough to put me off relationships as well as sex, these songs usually had a drinking component as well. [Singing in French] was sung to us with the genders alternating. So instead of focusing on the rose, virginity she wishes was still on the rose bush, he mourns her rejection based on the roses he did not give her. After all, too much talk of virginity might be unseemly. [Singing in French] openly to the possibility and even the normalcy of infidelity. Hinting also that the outcome of infidelity might be violence or death. To round up the 8th [singing in French] is about adult fun, even licentiousness, as being an ordinary part of human nature and of the facts of life as long as the door is closed."

00:07:25 Peggy

Thank you, Joan. Now, before I introduce the group they'll be reading tonight, which will be introduced by Kelly Martineau, I'd like to say that this event is being recorded. It will be later on It's About Time YouTube channel and available on podcast. I also see a lot of new names participating tonight and so that always gives me the happy opportunity to say welcome. And if you are a friend, family member, thank you for supporting your writer. If you're a writer, contact me because we'd love to have you come and read for us. Our first reader tonight, and she's the one who's going to talk a little bit about the group that has put together their shared their public work, their work to the public as a group, as they say, is Kelly Martineau. She's an essayist and poet in Seattle. Her work has appeared in Entropy, Little Patuxent Review, Sycamore Review, and The Florida Review, among other journals. Honors include a Pushcart Prize nomination and selection of her prose chapbook, Sirens|Silence, as a finalist for the May Day Mountain Series, Newfound Prose Prize, and Tiny Fork Chapbook Contest. Welcome, Kelly.

00:09:01 Kelly

Thank you, Peggy. So pleased to be here tonight. And I also like to thank everyone who's joining us tonight, so pleased that you're here to share in our words and talk about our group tonight. I just have to point out I'm so pleased, surprised to see a friend of mine from elementary school here and also from some high school. So it's just lovely to bring so many years of my supportive people together tonight. So I have been primarily a nonfiction writer but in the past few years, but I'm writing poetry and so I thought I would open with a poem tonight. And this one was recently published in a little patuxant review. And it was started based on a line based on a Vladimir Mayakovsky poem. And it is called "Ill Suited." "Unlike a cloud in trousers, a silhouette in gabardine, the sheen of heat over pavement, the pant of breath to steam here by default to falling in yards not of silk but of nylon. Our world in fog. The size is wrong, but I still want to try you on. You'll pull away from the fray, hitch me back up to time but a moment linger in this cirrus lace in this pocket you rivet, I rise." And I did want to shift gears right away and read a flash essay. I think we can all agree that it continues to be a very challenging time in the world and in our country. And I find for me that sometimes the best way that I can handle that is on focusing on the smallest moments and what I can gain from those. And this was an essay that I wrote a while ago when my children were fairly young. It's called "Grocery Exchange." "The woman with the silver hair, although a stranger, seems familiar to me. I have encountered her several times while crisscrossing the store, accompanied by a man I assume is her husband. She's seated in a motorized chair with a shallow meshed basket on which she rests her hands. Her hair is swept up from her nape in a small nest. She seems to be missing something. Whether memory or family or grocery, I know not. It's in the way people lean forward to speak to her. Their voice is soft with patience. I rush and shush. My three and six year old daughters, and my husband and I navigate the store and the untraveled terrain of a 7th day of vacation. Traveling up the main coast, we have stopped for groceries in a small inland town. While my older daughter pecks me with questions, the three year old squawks in my husband's arms. I leave my family and hurry across the store under the pretense of produce. I grab bananas, one bunch heavy with fruit. Even as my girls have scaled rocks and found their footing in the give and take of breaking ocean waves, I have longed for the fixed routine of the roost, for the solitary expanse between school drop off and pick up. Once we're online, I noticed the silver haired woman in front of us. She converses with the cashier, a woman whose hair is red with youth, who moves the groceries through her nimble hands as they speak. I cannot hear the older woman, but eventually, after the groceries have been bagged and the account settled and the man who I see now is a generation younger, waits to leave, the cashier pauses to smile at the silverhaired woman and says, 'It's a good day.' Then the woman does not acknowledge, so the cashier reaches over the still conveyor belt, over the counter, to grasp the older woman's hand. Then she repeats, 'It's a good day.' The woman with the silver hair tilts her head like a bird, seems finally to see the cashier, and nods with a gently opened face. I collect the image of their clasped hands, one client, the other bent with age, and I open my ears to the squeals of my girls. The exchange over, the man builds the silver haired woman toward the door. As I watch our bounty glide along the steady belt." I think time has always been a theme in my writing, even writing stories in elementary school and writing, as I've gotten older, about my childhood. And I think this is about another small moment, but a different kind of opening to more challenging, mysterious exchange, and one that took some time to come to some deeper realizations. About. This one is called "Divine Revelation." "I want to stay, but I get to leave for lunch. I smile at the threshold. She blinks back, glanced, pinched,

punched, sunken into shadowed sockets. She whispers, I don't want you to see me like this. I falter fall toward her body marooned on my grandfather's side of the bed where in summers I swam from end to end, floated and stretched between cool pressed sheets. As I watched her fix her face, the vanity she turned to tease me, my dear and her cherry hair with a flourish I reached for her. You are beautiful, I say, her red hair halo gone white. Her face naked of makeup and white lies. Her eyes widen two black pools stealing light from the room. I hide from what I don't yet recognize. And when I reach her, she now wears a placid smile, a gentle reassurance. But for years I float on the surface tensioning, the truth in the depths." The next poem I'm going to read is also has the theme of time in it, but I find myself writing in a fairly different stage, firmly in midlife and lots of changes happening to me and around me, and so some of the writing has a bit of a different tone. "Catch and release. At 33, I exchanged clumsiness for a baby as a mother, my body sashayed and swayed my newfound core of body knowledge and able partner in a dance I sometimes even led. Instead of a stone, I was a stallion, muscled, moving forward with force. My body blew gravity to keep me aloft and I learned the surprise pleasure of a ball, caught it's curve cupped in my able palm. But today, a decade later, heat and hunger flash so fast after yoga I am peeling off layers across the grocery store, stocking protein and cracking a can of cashews in the aisle when my body chases its essence, my pocket catches the oven handle, my purse strap snags the seat latch. I am fly flat, falling, tripped by crack or leaf or the invisible hand of gravity. My daughters, nine and twelve, grow inches overnight, but I am the one tripping over ungainly limbs. What fresh hell, what 'Flowers for Algernon' is this regression progression? A plea for estrogen, every waiver, a wave resting me back, praying to be hooked by the wildlife, cast from my own core. I'm caught, caught up, tossed back, a body released, tumbling in reverse yet still stumbling forward." And I'm going to close with a persona poem was written in a class with my mentor and friend Diane April, who is currently has lived here for ten years and has been a huge part of the writing community and is currently moving back to her home in Kentucky. And I just like to honor her role in helping me find my voice and my way with writing. "Journeywoman. I dash, dot, duck and weave my thunder shape atop and below the surface, alternating the bird's eye view with X ray vision, my eye sees all the colors. The unique world of working fingers, the precision of warp met west. Endurance is the threads ambition. While I am kin to pencil, my tip pierces fiber. Whether I am blunt or ballpoint, sharp or cruel, I will dull and be discarded. What remains will be the point, the sustenance provided by every single stitch." Thank you.

00:19:31 Peggy

Thank you, Kelly. That was lovely. Even though we're going to lose Diane back to Kentucky, the good news is, as long as we stay online, we can get her to come back and hear her read. So next, I'm going to be introducing Anne Liu Kellor. So. Good evening, Ann. Hi. Annes a mixed-race Chinese American writer, editor, and teacher based in Seattle. Her critically-acclaimed memoir, Heart Radical: A Search for Language, Love, and Belonging, was published in 2021 and praised by Cheryl Strayed as "insightful, riveting, and beautifully written." Anne's essays have appeared in publications such as YES! Magazine, Longreads, Fourth Genre, Witness, and New England Review. She is the recipient of fellowships from Hedgebrook, Seventh Wave, Jack Straw Writers Program, 4Culture, and Hypatia-in-the-Woods. Anne teaches writing workshops and facilitates a year-long creative nonfiction manuscript program for women and nonbinary writers seeking mentorship and community. Welcome, Anne.

00:20:41 Anne

Thank you, Peggy. Thank you, Kelly, for that beautiful reading. And thank you, all of you, for being here tonight and just want to also honor the Duwamish people and other Coast Salish people upon whose land I live and most of us live. So I'm so excited to be here with our writing group, and we'll talk more about us later. But I'm going to read some excerpts from "Heart Radical." And as I was trying to decide what to read tonight, I wanted to read something new that I hadn't read before. It came out in September, so I decided to try something different that one of my old mentors did a reading once, which is to read the first paragraph from each chapter of the first part because that's kind of what fits in my time. But I also just did it as an experiment to see, you know, to play with juxtaposition constraints and the surprise of what might be created. And so we'll see. We'll see what new peace or understanding emerges from this. "My entire life, I've craved more words. Words nourished me when I was little, gave me refuge when I was lonely or confused. And words guided me in my 20s when I set off from my home in the Pacific Northwest for western China, and often felt even more alone, but increasingly witnessed by myself on the written page, when I had few companions to speak to in English and still too few words in Chinese, when I wanted close friendships and romantic love. But it felt more tangible to reach for ideas of spiritual union. All I knew was I was filled with an intense longing and sorrow. Sorrow for the magnitude of suffering in the world, in China and Tibet, and within myself. Sorrow which I felt so clearly but couldn't understand, why I felt so deep. And as much as I wanted to be patient and not need to know or control exactly where my journey would take me, a huge part of me also wanted it to all make sense right away a logical, rational explanation of why this is meant to be. Karma, fate, my path with a capital P. The people you are meant to meet, the person you are meant to become, the ways in which you will be better loved once you do your part to save the world. I am collecting heartwork words in Chinese that are connected to the heart. Sang shin wounded heart to be sad, naishin endearing heart, to be patient, drunk heart to be fascinated or enchanted. I am fascinated by these words. My heart is drunk with this language. I know long, bust rides in China. I know that the roads will be rough and filled with craters. I know not to grow alarmed if we break down, if we are delayed for hours before a pile of rocks that have fallen in the middle of a one lane mountain road, or even if the passengers are asked to get out and push. I know how to squat and pee exposed on the side of the road, or in a filthy shack over a hole of shit in the ground if I must. I know I can wear my headphones and listen to cassette tapes while we ride. I know to get a window seat. I know how to sit back and watch the landscape pass by, relieved as it slowly grows more empty, mountainous and green. Even though we will always be reminded of the presence of people, the Chinese who have worked this land for thousands of years, I am good at being passive and patient. Maybe I learned this from my childhood. Maybe I learned this from my people. Every woman who lives in a house has a mere face away. She examines her reflection, tilts her head, casts her eyes, gauges her own appearance. After putting on makeup or combing her hair, she makes a final assessment of how she appears, or rather, what she thinks she looks like to others before she walks out the door into public. On the immigration form, they only let you check one box. Tourism, visiting, family, business or work none of these feel accurate. There's no category for what I want to do here. On one hand, I want a plan, an easy blueprint for how I can create a life for myself in China. And teaching English seems like the best way. On the other hand, I don't want to commit. I still want to travel to LASSA and beyond, to connect with more people, to stay open to circumstance, a sense of fate whispering in my ear. This is what you are here for. When I return to Chengdu from Lassa, I am

relieved to have an apartment waiting, a place to unpack my things, to wake slowly and make a cup of tea, to light incense and write in my journal. A place to finally be alone again, to finally make my own. If my students saw me dancing but I have no idea what they think. That I was on drugs, mentally ill, wildly unknowable, like other foreign ghosts out on the crowded streets or standing in front of class. I must be smiling, friendly, keeping an open, diplomatic face. But in the privacy of my apartment, I seek to hold on to my rawness, the intensity of how I feel things, the parts of me that feel most real, the parts that are least exposed. Champagne lives in Yulin, a central neighborhood populated with cafes, bars, expats and Chinese artsy types. I take a cab to her apartment on Saturday afternoon after spending most of Friday and Saturday morning painting, unable to pull myself away from my new creation. She answers the door wearing a short black sundress, and leads me to her studio. A small, bare room, the lighting harsh and fluorescent on the floor. In the corners, it's a narrow mattress. Canvases are stacked against the wall. At first glance, they look almost exactly the same, all the same shade of sage green, and all with a bird, a thin, elongated ghost of a bird, like a heron or crane standing enclosed in a room. When I was in high school, my mother used to smell me when I came home late at night. My bedroom was across from my parents, and I was supposed to knock and say, I'm home. She'd come out into the hallway in her pajamas to give me a hug, which was her way of getting close to me, hunting for the scent of cigarettes or alcohol. The farther the taxi gets from the college, the more anonymous and free I begin to feel. I smoke the harsh cigarette the driver gave me till its very end, licking the butt out the window. When we pull up at tomorrow's hotel in the east central part of Chengdu, we pull my plastic bags, boxes, and backpacks out on the curb, then lug all my stuff into the lobby. The people at the front desk look at us strangely but don't ask questions. I figure I'll stay with Tomorrow for a week or so until I figure out a new plan. Mama, I haven't talked to you in weeks. I emailed you and Daddy to let you know I quit my job, but beyond that, you know nothing. I know nothing. I am floating, untethered, unmored. I have no work, no residence, no official reason for staying in Chengdu. I thought that teaching English would be the easiest way to enter in here, but it was too much. And I don't want to be a teacher. I want to be a student. I want to meet other writers and artists. I want to immerse myself in unsynctified versions of this place. I want to speak more Chinese." Thank you.

00:29:39 Peggy

Now tell me, where did you get the idea? Did you say you've seen someone else do that?

00:29:45 Anne

My mentor in grad school. Charmin Apt Russell. I got my MSA from Antioch LA. She did that at a reading. And I thought it was so cool to get a taste of the book as a whole and create a new kind of collage piece out of it.

00:30:01 Peggy

I agree. And it was fascinating. I don't know if you practice, but the great thing is now you'll be able to watch it and see what you created.

00:30:11 Anne

Yeah, I mean, I already noticed unexpected things like, oh, talking about cigarettes and then cigarettes.

00:30:19 Peggy

I know. And the bus roads. But yeah, it was a perfect ending, really. So thank you. Okay, let's see who's up next. So Mary Pan is writer and physician with a background in global health and narrative medicine. Her work has appeared in Creative Nonfiction, McSweeney's, Intima, and elsewhere. She is a Tin House 2020 Nonfiction Winter Workshop alum and a 2020 Media & Medicine Harvard Medical School fellow. The recipient of a 2019 Artist Trust Grants for Artists' Projects Literary Award, she was runner-up for AWP's 2020 Kurt Brown Prize for Creative Nonfiction. Welcome, Mary.

00:31:15 Mary

Thanks, Peggy. I wanted to say thanks so much for having us and really excited to be here. And thanks, Anne. I really enjoyed that reading from the first chapters or the first paragraph of each chapter. That was really great. So I'm going to start with a flash piece that I've been working on a book, my first book that's really about mental illness and identity. And this is the first piece that's been published from that manuscript, and it was published in "Creative Nonfiction Sunday Short Reads" a few months back. So this is "All the Sharps." "I sit on my bathroom floor, listening as my husband tries to make an appointment with his doctor, any doctor for tomorrow. The charcoal tile cool beneath me, marches between us in perfect lines. I remember picking out the tile slabs during our home remodel half a decade ago. All those decisions. All those decisions. The endless choices of kitchen drawer poles, nursery paint color, tint of the hardwood floor stain. They make up this home. He reluctantly describes his symptoms and history to the consulting nurse. Severe depression, hospitalized for suicidality two months ago. Not sure the meds are working. Paranoia thoughts that he would be better off dead. He is simultaneously annoyed by and apathetic about the nurse's questions. My bottom aches. Sore from sitting for so long on a firm surface. My stomach rumbles, but I don't feel hungry. I have spent the better half of this Sunday trying to convince my husband to get help and consider readmittance to the psychiatric hospital. His back is leaned up against our bathtub. I sit between him and our master bathroom door. The nurse goes through the PHQ Nine and Gad Seven questionnaires commonly used tools for measuring a person's level of depression and anxiety. He's answered the questionnaires dozens of times by now. Daily yardsticks when hospitalized in a psychiatric ward, how often in the last two weeks have you been feeling down, depressed or hopeless? Poor appetite or overeating? Feeling afraid is if something awful might happen. As a primary care physician myself, I've administered these questionnaires to hundreds of patients. I have them memorized. Even though I can't hear what questions she asks, he glances in my direction. With each inquiry, he uses a standard zero to three scale to respond 2313. I guess he's weary in the answering as if he were swatting at a fly that won't leave him alone. Realizing he does have active suicidal ideation, she screens for safety. Do you have a gun in the home? A plan for self harm? Have you bought or collected anything to help you carry out this plan? I think of all the things he's thrown himself into over the years. Bamboo furniture, landscaping, marathons. He qualified for a Duafon World Championship with Team USA years ago, before we had children. We both flew to Australia so he could compete. He marched in a parade with the other athletes lined up behind their respective national flags. He ran and cycled and ran some more through the Newcastle streets, a road that

wound alongside a tan, jagged rock face. I barely caught a glimpse of him as he sped by on his sleek bike, hugging the sheer cliffs. The nurse tells him there are no appointments with psychiatrists until later this week. I feel a swell of rage at the nurse, at my husband's psychosis, at a medical system which I am a part of that would drag him up, spit him out and create this paranoid stranger sitting before me on our bathroom floor. I grabbed the phone from his hand. He needs an appointment tomorrow with anyone they can consult, the psychiatrist on call. I know how the system works, that any clinician can consult the psychiatrist about medical management or plan of care. I don't know if the nurse knows that I know this, but something in the tenor of my voice must convey my desperation. Okay, let me see what I can do. He won't meet my eyes, my husband. He won't say a word to me as we wait. He has been convinced to seek help when all he wants is for it to end, to all be over. They find him an appointment for tomorrow. I let out a breath, just a sliver of a sigh. It escapes into the air between us, dissipating into a rift. He takes the phone, listens to the instructions. 'Okay,' he replies, as if he couldn't be less all right with the plan, with. The fact that he is still breathing, cornered by his wife, who stands between him and his exit from his bathroom, from his house, from his life. He hands me the phone. 'This is Anne,' she says, one of the social workers. 'Your husband agrees not to harm himself tonight. I suggest you get everything sharp out of the house, anything he could use to hurt himself.' I can hear the apology in her voice, a bow of intonation I have become increasingly familiar with since my husband's descent into severe depression. 'Okay, yes, I'll get them all out.' My mind races, our whole house. The kitchen knives I used to cut the kids fruit in the morning, the razors I used to shave my legs, the blades to his power saw in the basement, the one he used to fashion a backyard swing from a two x four. Those tiny scissors I used to trim my eyebrows, the ones I've just caught him tracing along his forearm, sharp tip angled toward a pulsing artery as I walked back into the bathroom after nursing our eight month old baby downstairs. 'What are you doing?' I asked him, my pitch high. Nothing, he said, and shoved the scissors back into the cabinet drawer alongside my lip balm, my mascara. I look at my husband. His gaze is down, his jaw defiant. How can I my voice trails off, but the social worker interprets my question. 'Just do the best you can. Get all the razors and the knives and the pills. You can only do the best you can.' She repeats it, and the mantra rolls over in my mind, through my empty gut. I hang up the phone and he brushes by me, doesn't look up. I'm going to the appointment tomorrow. Alone. He disappears out of our bathroom, leaving a weight in his wake. I say nothing. I find a bag and begin gathering all the razors, all the pills, all the sharps to hide away."

00:38:24 Peggy

You're leaving us there. I've heard and read parts that before, but hearing you read it is so powerful. I have to ask, was anybody else able to breathe while they were listening? It was really hard. Thank you for putting that out there with that in your own voice. It's really powerful work, all of you. Thank you.

00:38:53 Mary

Thanks, Peggy. I'm going to read another just really short prose. And this one was in the "Mixture Slot" by the Curve series. And it's a prose poem. So it's titled "20 Years From Now. Sometime in mid May." "After Dana Smith in lieu of a poem. I'd like to say in lieu of a poem. I'd like to predict the past new work. Leadership position. Microsoft teams and emails pouring in and out and lists of tasks and

meetings and what did I get myself into? And buying a car during Covid-19 haggling with the dealer behind plexiglass and paper duck beak masks and teaching improper fractions to my nine year old and why are they called improper? They are just differently shaped, really, just not cleanly severed. And the yard full of grass growing and kickballs strewn and lilacs browning to a sickly tan. And a man who left the 1 March, 2 days before the patient's test came back positive for coronavirus, admitted to the ICU. They say she's otherwise healthy and young, but she's on a ventilator and was just here at this clinic, maybe in that exam room, maybe used that bathroom and sat on that chair. And is it airborne? Respiratory droplets? How long can it live on a surface? And no one knows yet, not even the King County Health Department or the New York Times or the rest of the country still crowding their restaurants and swinging on their playgrounds and hugging their grandparents. And you run down the hall to get the last box of N 95 masks half empty left in the foot care clinic and hand it to your colleague, the single mother with an asthmatic seven year old, the only doctor in the clinic who is fitted for PPE. And you have to take a break and sigh here. Was that so long ago? Was that just ten weeks ago? And he's living in the yellow house and the kids are there each Wednesday night and the silence is agonizing and the silence is glorious and you take a breath and you weep in the middle of a guided visualization meditation when she says now, imagine yourself 20 years from now."

00:41:18 Peggy

Thank you. All right, anything else you're going to pull out on us tonight? Thank you. I love the variety too. All right, so the last of your group tonight welcome Jenne. Jenne Hsien Patrick is a writer and artist based in Seattle, WA. She writes poetry, makes comics and text/image works incorporating textiles and papercutting, and is currently writing about motherhood, family history, and self-preservation and survival as an inheritance from the matriarchal lines of her family. She was a scholarship recipient to the Mendocino Coast Writers Conference and is an alum of the Tin House Winter Workshop. Jenne's work has appeared in publications such as wildness/Platypus Press, and Honey Literary among others. Welcome, Jenne.

00:42:18 Jenne

Hi, everyone. Thank you so much, Peggy, for hosting us. And wow, I have to follow Mary. Okay. I didn't think about that when we thought about the order, so take a deep breath. It's so beautiful. I have a couple of pieces that I'd like to share. I write mostly poetry, but I dabble in prose as well, and oftentimes mythology will come in as a sort of a space to play in memoir and in thinking about almost as a structure reform. The first piece is called "Beyond the Sea." "The ocean's movement never ceases inertia and action contained within one body as waves land serves water as both boundary and shape, a tender cupped hand catching each drop in its imperfect bowl, skin glistening from moisture and ever catching shore. Newl looked out at the sea and wondered to herself what is out there beyond the edge of the sea? She returned to the palace and asked her father, the emperor, this question with his booming voice and authority. He declared there was nothing and no one shall venture there and that there was absolutely no use wondering. Nual walked down, back down to the shore and decided to find out some things for herself. After treatment, they say you are a survivor. Cells continue to grow, turn on or off hormones that fill receptors day in and day out. In all versions of the myth, we lose track of her body. Nuaga's out in a boat or plays in the sea, drowns, becomes a bird and flies back home. There is no dead girl in any version to bury, to perform rituals and rites, for

she is always transformed into bird body, magnificent with exotic plumage, returning to become her father's pet her mesmerizing cry and admirable work ethic turns a disobedient daughter into a venerated bird child. This bird form, named Jingwei, bites hold of twigs and stones, flies over the sea and drops them one by one, day after day, determined to fill up the deep blue sea so that no other child will drown. Perseverance is the wrong word for a task that you are doomed to fail at from the beginning. The correct word for this is penitence. The legend of the jingle bird is a story that I never heard as a child. At the end of treatment, after going through chemotherapy surgery, your success is determined by one single number preceding a percentage sign until time stills and starts to move in reverse. Every moment thereafter brings back the possibility of cancer returning. The probability of your survival decreases each moment after you have survived, so long as you continue to live. The only story I was told as a child is of the dragon that my grandmother saw with her own eyes, flat bellied on the mud next to the water. She repeated that story enough times that it exploded into 100 myths, even obscuring her own mother's name. And this is the simple truth that to live is to feel one self lost. He who accepts it has already begun to find himself to be on firm ground. These are the only genuine ideas, the ideas of the shipwrecked. From Revolt of the Masses by Jose Ortega. IGA Sat nua is still on the boat, traveling across the sea. There is a larger ocean and even land beyond and beyond that. The turbulent water she now calls home surrendered to the ocean's waves. She gains her footing in coral, cutting to the bone, blood leaking into the salt water with each step, the sting and the scar tissue it will remain bloodlines dissipate with the currents as she emerges towards an unknowable future." My next poem is a longer narrative poem. Actually, I don't think I told the group, but actually originated out of a prompt with Anne and then came up again later as I was trying to write a poem. The memory that came up in that writing emerged into this poem. So it's kind of the way that the relationship between generating and community. And then when you're by yourself, you're like, oh, there was that thing. And so the collaborative aspect of writing sort of emerged in this poem for me. Poems called "The Child Finds a Dead Bird." "A child finds a dead bird on the path soft, limp body laying flat on the redwood needled ground. The fog obscures the morning and the trail disappears a few steps ahead. The rest of the small children circle around. They all point at the still bird, hesitant to break their mother's gravity, holding back to just hover over the soft belly, so prone to the sky. One mother sighs, another quietly murmurs let's move along. This often happens, usually bones or a clean, dry, ravaged carcass. The children will find days left, a pile of jawbone and leg cleaned. This bird's fluff must underwing is irresistible. One child in a blue puffy parker breaks the silence, darts out his hand. It's still warm, suddenly stuck. He screamed, still poking at the breast. He's plucked his finger deep into a large toothshaped hole. We become glass, silent. The mothers understand in unison that this could be the mountain lands. Recent morning catch, maybe dropped from above, captracked by her ear tag, to this ravine, pregnant, spotted earlier in the week up in the branch lazily yawning, about to sleep as the sun starts to break through the fog soaked trees. I remember what they taught us that first week on the mountain to stand tall, to bare my teeth, to make big my body. And how hard it is to make big when small is the only way I've learned to make myself in order to survive. The women in my family taught me that kind of quiet, the steady, invisible chopping of vegetables, wearing a smile that clearly came out to obscure any tears. I wish they too knew the big, the way making yourself larger than life can sometimes maybe help you face anything. The death of fathers love your homeland. It's no guarantee, but it is the opposite of hiding. I wish I could show them how. Mothers, mothers, all standing taller and taller. We all remember hands reaching up as we

cathedral over the children. A second child, also in a blue parka, puts her hand on the bird's wing, slightly widens the span and whispers don't be scared. And now seven tiny hands are rain over the dead bird's body may be a gray dove as we mothers wobble on tiptoes, all of the mothers making as big as they can, their bodies breathing through open teeth. I match the redwood tree shadow limb by limb with my own elbowed branch. For what else can a mother do but sway and hope in the wind. When the fog dries out and the sun is cutting rays to the dusty forest ground, the children, unaware of their mother's incantation, begin to lose interest. The dead bird becomes a dead bird. One by one the children start to cry. One mother breaks and bends her trunk, pumps an offering hand sanitizer upon their tiny palms that smell slightly lemon. What scrubbing could wash off the feathered down already rubbed into eyes? Or bless the flesh soaked fingernail of the curious child now bawling between hiccups and as her tears slow, the child in the polka dot raincoat turns and rubs what remains of the gel into the bird's forehead, just between its eyes and anointing we quiet again. The hike was supposed to end with a picnic at the pond. We stay with the bird until noon and leave hungry." And I think I have one last poem. Yes, I've got one last poem. Here another mother poem. Read a lot of grandma and mother poems. This one is called "Map Making." "Mother's blood makes earth bodies and topography. Only she can help me build this three dimensional model. She adds water to the glue made mostly of rice flour, lays each damp paper strip in a slight overlap to create the Great basin of the Pacific Mountains. Massaged at a soft gluey pulp the peaks of Alishan, remembered attenuated by fingertips high above the outline of her green island. The interstate highlighted in yellow marks the route, though in the car the map always remains folded in her lap. One hand is on the steering wheel, passing semis snacking on dried sugared, pineapples and papaya, and I'm sucking on sour rings in the backseat. She gestures with a spear. We follow the sun home. I can't read a paper map anymore. Magnetic north is now something decoded by satellite. My movements crease sharp folded mountains into maps to mark home. Hashtag. But where's home and hashtag homesick are recognized by my body before my mind and my finger click like remember the magic hour. Shadows elongate rust in water. The thin light reveals a closed seam between sky and horizon. At dusk, the directional axis is made visible as the constellations light up in the east. What was left behind is invisible upon the waves, except for to those who drown in the dark gyre. A basin for washing up can be used as many times as the water remains clear until it is muddied and rinsed to use again." Thank you.

00:52:55 Peggy

Thank you. Love the variety of all your work. I think what I'd like to do now is have our two open mic readers and then come back to opening it up to a discussion about your writing group so that we can have a little more Q and A. So you would like to do the three minute open mic, followed by Tiffany. So are you ready, Danny?

00:53:25 Danny

I've got ultra short and short, so here's ultra short. "This January in summary was wintery all spring as fall, the rains to autumn. That's for today. And this is a letter to a verb. Dear Go, I marvel at the economy of your verbiage, the capacious, two letters that surely could hop, travel, skip, jump, ski and give. That egotist is a run for its essentialist money. In short, I admire your brevity and spunk and flash my golden scales and the sparkling refraction of the deep teals and diamond hues of the airy

bubbles that light my watery home like a discotheque that never closes but continually recirculates. It's 50 gallons and a galleon in the unending now where you remain the true life of the party. And so I say thanks a lot for the energy, go, your friend, Fish." Thank you.

00:54:47 Peggy

Thank you, Danny. Next. Welcome, Tiffany. I'm glad you found us and asked to read. Welcome.

00:54:57 Tiffany

Hello and thank you. Thank you for having me. I'm going to read my free verse poem titled "Bao Games." "Midnight pours out the scent of blue snapdragons as she played a game of bao in far off Nairobi streets. Her body language was serious then. Her hands were motioning to a man to follow her into a complex type dream into my ancestors village while the fathomless eyes of a fragmented city are lost under the black skies of America my opponent rose in Jacksonville and gathered water along a threadbare delta. I was loitering in California on a politician's lawn under a scarlet sun. My brown skin was SKINTILLATING in Verona you spewed out your mother tongue during a game of bow. Lies were bought and sold. You bottled your joy, waged war on native soil. I lost my mansions at sunrise I serve molasses and egg whites. I could barely utter a sound in my frayed apron among the Texan plane. You hated my black skin. I was then a boy you taught to run. You were nestled into Scottish foothills. My father I was then your collisionist daughter born again, run free hope in the wilderness with quaking villas and black sparrows. I took down my altar and I was the oldest of the female sex. I was marauded at sea. I drifted among lotus flowers lost in the ruins of an Arabian palace. You were my makebelieve suitor rooted in reality turned rival. You married a modern caricature of a sophisticate that was your sister wife in Sacramento for she was a portly bride tango to a disco beach. Clouds dance over the mare wanton spinsters banished to a rainforest carrying their wine. My next opponent was a rainstorm. He courted winged fairies and played the clarinet off key with an RnB jazz ensemble. He was friends with the drummer who was the emperor of winds carrying his drink with a new woman. The Queen of Marigold lost at a televised game of bow that wasn't worth a bride's dowry in Africa she became a dispossessed queen of the mad on a forbidden carousel of night midnight poured out the scent of blue snapdragons as she played a game of bao in my head." Thank you.

00:58:27 Peggy

Thank you. Thank you for finding us here tonight. Thanks. All right, well, Kelly, Mary, Jenne and over to you to tell the audience a little bit about your writing group.

00:58:44 Kelly

Thank you, Peggy. Really enjoyed to be here and share in the words of the readers who joined us and just glad to be part of the evening. I was going to just introduce a little bit about the genesis of our writing group. My first writing group developed out of my graduate school program, which was a low residency program. Falling in Kentucky just happened to be that two or two other students from Seattle and then Diane April, as I mentioned, happened to move here in 2010, just after the other three of us had graduated. So began this writing group, which was so nurturing and helpful to me because I was a new mother and trying to sustain my writing through that, which is kind of a theme

that runs through our writing group as well, motherhood and creativity. And we worked in that group for a few years pretty consistently. And then, of course, life events happened and someone had to step away. And I happened to be taking a class with Anne at that time and Mary was also in the class.

01:00:09 Kelly

Anne and I connected and asked her to join our group and then she came into it. And then again, time and shifts, people had to step away and we would bring new people in and kind of continued along in that way with a somewhat shifting group of amazing writers for a few years and then formed a new group with Mary and another writer and eventually that person also had to step away. And then Jenne was also in a class with Mary and Anne, and so she became part of the group in 2018, I believe. And we've been working together primarily, beginning with critiquing each other's work and as Anne wrote in our description, bonding over a love of lyrical prose and poetry and experiencing the challenges of motherhood and writing. And then the pandemic happened and we were no longer able to meet in person, but we began meeting in zoom and a lot shifted in terms of the kind of ways we were supporting each other and coming together. And I will let them continue to tell that story.

01:01:41 Anne

Yeah, I was going to talk about writing groups just briefly. I love to help create community and with a lot of my classes at the end, I often will ask who in the room wants to be in a writing group, who isn't? And try to get a conversation going and match people up before the class ends. So we thought that our talk here tonight could be around literary community writing groups. I'm sure some of you are already in groups, but maybe some of you are looking and that can be kind of hard to find and elusive. And also, I've been in a few, but this one is the one that's the most long standing and I think it's because of the intention behind what we've created and what we want. If you are looking for a writing group, there's just so many different kinds, right? There's some that are just about accountability and support and that can even just be a partner, somebody to share your goals with and check in with and share submitting opportunities. And then there are generative groups to come together and create, which I'm sure some of you have done. And then there are the more classic critique based group where you exchange work. And our group has done a little bit of everything. But I just want to say it's so important to know what you're looking for, right? And to know what you want to get out of the group. To know what kind of time commitment you want to put in. To have people be on the same page with that. To ask yourself if you want it to be genre specific or if all of the members are comfortable also giving feedback in different genres and just how much time you want to commit and your experience level matching that. So our group, for example, for the most part has met every month and then with only four members, and we take turns and half the group submits each month. And for me, for most of us who are so busy, we're all moms like, that's enough, right? And if the group was much any larger than we'd have less opportunities to submit. And if the group was and also reading two people, critiquing two people in one evening was enough for us because then we could also spend time connecting and checking in and socializing. So I think that's really all I want to say for now. The other thing too, is just like how important is to have a shared sense of workshop guidelines? You know, really like for our group, we would take the first round of giving feedback as a time to honor what's working and call out the lines that have energy, speak to the themes and what we feel

the pieces are about, and really take that time to honor what's working. Because so often, I think in critique groups, it's like, okay, let's jump to fix it mode, prescriptive mode. And that can just be so crushing. And I think it's a cultural thing too, right, to want to fix and critique? But yeah, and then that second round is where you offer suggestions and point out what was confusing and all of those helpful things. So that's kind of where we were at when we were in more critique mode. But I'll let Mary and Jenne talk more about how we've evolved.

01:05:20 Mary

Yeah, thanks, Anne. I was going to talk a little bit about also this idea of sort of finding community and connection as a non traditional writer, taking a different path that I did and coming to writing and looking for a writing group a bit later. And I think all of us, whatever path we take, can often find it challenging to find that community and connection. And this has been such a gift. I think part of it also has been getting to know each other's work as writers and artists. We've also thought of each other when opportunities arise, and so that's been a huge thing for us, whether it's classes or residencies or submission opportunities. And as we've gotten to know each other over the years, that's a big thing. We've gotten to know each other as artists and also as each other's writing style. And we've been generous in connecting each other with those opportunities too, which has been such a gift also. And I think I see David here too, like, trying out different things as far as Haiku Comics class, Jericho Brown Poetry Workshop that Jenne let us know about, that I ended up signing up for. And I didn't really think of myself as a poet and that was a great opportunity too, or definitely I'm not comic either. So, David, thank you for that class. I learned so much and it was so fun. Jenne and Anne were doing it and I said, Why don't I try this? So I think that's also been a great connecting point for our group, is trying out different genres and being inspired by each other's work as well has been a huge positive part of this group.

01:07:00 Kelly

And kind of taking off from there. I think one thing that's been so powerful during the pandemic when we've been meeting online is seeing on Instagram each other's feeds the different creative outlets that we're leaning into and processing through. I think each of us had a point in the pandemic, and I think this is probably true for a lot of people where we just weren't able to write. It just was very challenging or felt like it was coming from a very different place. And creating making, whether it's writing or fiber craft for me, is a huge way that I process and persevere in my life. And it was such a pleasure to see Jen's garden. Jen's posted on Instagram every day and would write these brief lyrical pieces about what she was experiencing in her life and in her garden and with her family and with her work. And it was still helpful to kind of be held by that and see someone finding different ways to connect and live in the world in this very strange, in solar time. And then. As Mary mentioned. They did this Haiku Comics class and then seeing those. Some of those pop up on Instagram and through that and through some way rediscovering her relationship with visual art and seeing gens paper cutting and just all these ways that relate a lot of ways to the work that we do. But lending this kind of other level and energy and almost place to the work that we're doing together. And also just that idea of when it was hard to find words, recognizing that I wasn't alone in that, that we weren't alone in this moment and that there was still creative creativity and discovery to be found even in this time. I've just always appreciated that. And that's been very sustaining, I think, for us.

01:09:34 Jenne

Yeah, I just wanted to mention this idea of collaboration. Writing is a collaboration with life, right? And half of writing is living life. And we inform each other, like writing in isolation, really. Even if you don't have a person that you're writing with, you're in conversation, with your environment, your memories, there's always a conversation happening. There's always kind of a relational aspect to it. I didn't realize that it's true. It's since 2018. It's been a long time, and I think a lot of it has been. We've been able to sustain this energy of connection and collaboration because of being open to what is at any moment when we meet. Every single meeting, other things came up or it was different. And we always kind of met each other where we're at and what we could generate in that moment and how we could be present with each other creatively. And I really love this group as a collaboration because like I said before, one of the poems before came out of an exercise we did together that Ann led for us and that informed this piece. And then this piece is now informing Comic. I'm making there's this relationality that's kind of moving through the different genres that I work in and then it's going to circle back because I'll share it with you all when it's done. But that is to say that I think expanding my idea of what a writing group could be. I think before it was meeting in person and critiquing each other's work and really meeting each other in that place. But continuing to meet and continuing to honor this commitment and getting to know each other's work more and more has really created an opportunity to start collaborating and thinking of other places that we can meet. Like literally meeting on the page. We started a collaborative writing exercise during the pandemic. I was definitely feeling I can't write anything. So we were thinking, okay, let's try something we'll write together, sort of a round robin style. And so that became a meeting space over the couple of months where we just it's my turn, I'm going to go and see what has been cultivated in the soil of this page and respond. That can also be a shape of a writing group that's another relationship, another collaboration with folks just literally meeting on a Google Doc and the beautiful potential of that. And so I think we were going to. Read a tiny segment of it, the beginning of it spring, which, oddly enough, was pretty much the same time at the beginning of the pandemic. So are you all ready to jump in and share a little bit of our collaborative meeting space? Yes. Okay, so I'm going to read and we'll just hop in when it's your part. It's called "Regeneration: Measuring Time During the Pandemic." "One spring today, I stood in the rain I watched as the water bathed the tulips, their stems bending at the waist from the weight a cupped praise to the sunshine that will return. Last week well, I don't know who last week was or I don't know who I was last week. My body may be a feather. It felt stuck to a spider's web once attached to a living, breathing bird, the ultimate catch shivering as the spider inspected my husk. Today I'm a nautilus growing a new section of shell after my flesh has grown too large for my shape. Today is the day today or is it dawn? Or is it night? Falling asleep easier these evenings as the leaves still in the bare trees obscuring the streetlights even as the robin is still singing his midnight song he must think this is an eternal dawn all night he calls out I am up late too keeping to my own time."

01:13:54 Mary

"Keeping my own time in a basket. In a bundle in a pile of knots and keys I attempt comfort with the steady progress of thread words and yarns hems men's. Applique flowers articulated by stitches into skeletons to bones represent the future or the past. The present either unfelt or heavy upon us,

messy. Some prefer the clarity of looking at the past. But it can become so easily just a flower press devoid of detail, dimensionality scent no sense of span, only remnant. I get tangled in these minor currents. The evolutions have brought us here. Our bodies housed the past. Jen spoke of the comfort of living in a house that had sustained life through loss. Architecture that has breathed scourge and bounty and years of lean. Today we live these hearty bones beneath our skin. Intention in the Spine."

01:15:12 Anne

"The spine bends as I lean forward over my keyboard, typing as the rain falls. It is Thursday. And Thursday is quiet. It is deafening. Thursday morning I am alone and present with myself all the shoulds that should be. Instead, I see the raindrops pattern on the back deck. I hear the birds chirping in the neighbors evergreen tree. I taste my morning coffee bitter from the reheating I slept in this morning. A luxury. Where does intention lie? Is it pliable or steadfast like the spine? Maybe it is both a paradox of solidity and movement, of concreteness and malleability. Bones live in the past, move into the future. The marrow can regenerate in four to six weeks. The spongy innards that produce themselves the origin origins are the source of intention my mother had good intentions when she married my father. Boarded that plane in 1970, flew to Taiwan. When suspicion buried all intention like it does now. She wasn't thinking of a good life for us at the time, but that's what she gave now I intend the same. I think of my three children. Each of their spines formed from cells dividing regeneration. I am my mother. More of the same."

01:16:39 Kelly

"Same as it ever was. We have never experienced anything like this before. More of the same. Always hoping for that promise of forever, that solidity of knowing, of certitude. Up till death do we part. But life doesn't work that way. Promises die, intentions change, pets grow ill, crops fail. And yet, too briefly a flower blooms. A moment surges. A taste of clarity, of yes, of this, of love welling up in the heart, in the eyes of I can't believe you are here for me. Are you real? Or are you a projection of what I seek? Do you become less real as the formerly unknown parts fill themselves in? Or do you become more real as projections fall away, skeletons emerge. Real shapes of real life lived traumas named bruises, scars shaping lifetimes generations millennia of ancestry and patterns. Same as it ever was. More of the same. More unpredictable rise and fall of weather patterns. Emotions. Today mostly cloudy but not so dark it pulls you under tomorrow clear skies. To what god do we owe this fortune?" And that's part one of our rounds.

01:18:20 Peggy

Thank you. Part one indeed. And as I said, what a pleasure to just basically turn the program over to you and have you prepare such a bounty for us. We really appreciate it. I think what I'm going to do now is I'm going to end the recorded portion so that we can just allow the audience members to sort of unmute and chat. But I want to thank you all our new open mic readers, your friends, past members of the writing group, perhaps future members of as yet unformed writing groups for creating such a wonderful community as ever here at It's About Time Writers' Reading Series. So thank you and goodnight.